



## Dupuis gives a snapshot of the mediation program

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**EDITORS NOTE:** This story is one in a series featuring DATCP employees and their programs.

MADISON – John Dupuis has a background in art. He really enjoys a photography technique called negative sandwiching where you put several pictures together to make an alternative image. Dupuis' work at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) in the mediation program is much the same. He brings together two different parties to make an alternative conclusion that is hopefully a positive one.

When you call the Wisconsin Farm Center, the person on the other end of the line may be Dupuis. Dupuis has been with DATCP for more than five years, and for the last three, has led the mediation program as a Community Services Technician.



"The Wisconsin Farm Center has a dedicated staff, and we all share responsibilities," said Dupuis. When I come to work, I know that the calls coming into the hotline will vary widely in subject and the needed response."

The Wisconsin Farm Center offers resources for farmers and their families including financial analysis, herd-based diagnostics, transition planning and access to counseling. Dupuis can help farmers access any of these services, but his specialty is mediation. He is the one who ensures cases are handled, deadlines are met and volunteers are trained.

The mediation program assists farmers, their creditors and various U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies to address loan problems, adverse decisions and other disputes. Wisconsin's mediation program began in 1989 to help negotiate challenging situations before turning to litigation.

Examples of cases needing mediation could be an adverse determination by USDA for a wetlands violation, loan denial, loan acceleration or conservation violation.

"A lot of the determinations can be quite confusing," added Dupuis. "I like when I can get the farmer on the right page and find options that best fit the situation."

There is no charge for mediation services. The program is federally funded. About 80 to 100 farmers in Wisconsin enter mediation each year. While not every case ends in agreement, mediation offers an opportunity to settle without entering the traditional legal process.

To begin mediation, a farmer should first call Dupuis at the Wisconsin Farm Center to open the case. Dupuis takes a copy of the letter outlining the potential violation and sends the farmer a formal application.

Dupuis then reaches out to the other parties involved to describe the process. A volunteer with the right skill set is then assigned to conduct mediation. Everyone will come together for one or more meetings. The final stage of mediation is a written and signed agreement. Cases could be open for only a few weeks or extend more than a year.

"We are fortunate to have more than 20 mediators and 20 financial advisors volunteering their time with the mediation program. Many of these volunteers have 20 years of experience working with

farmers in mediation,” explained Dupuis. “It has been very rewarding to get to know the volunteers as individuals, and I cannot express enough appreciation for their continued willingness to offer their time and professional services to Wisconsin farmers.”

During his time at DATCP, Dupuis has greatly broadened his knowledge of agriculture and what it means to the state. While calls continually come into the Wisconsin Farm Center, Dupuis does notice an uptick in mediation cases in the late fall or early spring. Hard financial times can also increase the case load.

Besides his responsibility with the mediation program, Dupuis supports the Rural Electric Power Services Program and assists farmers applying for the Beginning Farmer and Farm Asset Owner Tax Credit. This provision allows established farmers to get a state income tax credit on the lease of certain farm assets to qualified beginning farmers. It also gives beginning farmers a one-time, state income tax credit for tuition paid to take courses in farm business management or accounting.

“This tax credit helps youth getting started in farming while benefiting the established farmer at the same time,” said Dupuis.

Before coming to DATCP, he worked for the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association. Dupuis grew up in rural Verona and earned a bachelor’s degree in art education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Just as he puts pictures together in his photography, Dupuis will keep putting together the pieces to make solutions in the Wisconsin Farm Center, one mediation case at a time.

Contact the Wisconsin Farm Center toll-free at 1-800-942-2474 or [farmcenter@wisconsin.gov](mailto:farmcenter@wisconsin.gov). For more on mediation services or the tax credit, visit [http://datcp.wi.gov/Farms/Wisconsin\\_Farm\\_Center](http://datcp.wi.gov/Farms/Wisconsin_Farm_Center).

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